

**Homily, Third Sunday of Easter**  
**57<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the Slovak Catholic Federation**  
**Allentown, Pennsylvania**  
**26 April 2009**

Your Excellencies, Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We gather today to celebrate the Third Sunday of Easter, “the Day of the Lord,” the day when we recall his glorious resurrection and recognize his mysterious presence among us. “The Eucharist is our most beautiful treasure. It is the Sacrament *par excellence*; it ushers us into eternal life in advance; it contains the entire mystery of our salvation; it is the source and summit of the action and life of the Church.” (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 8; see Homily of Pope Benedict XVI, Closing of the 49<sup>th</sup> International Eucharistic Congress, Quebec, Canada, 22 July 2008). In the name of our Lord, we commence this 57<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the Slovak Catholic Federation – or, as your founders profoundly named it in our mother tongue – “Združenie slovenských katolíkov.” During sixty years of my priestly service I have had continual contacts with your organization and my presence among you today is, truly, an expression of my gratitude for your work and your support.

Dear Bishop Edward Cullen, I am thankful for your gracious welcome into your Diocese of Allentown.

Dear Father Philip Altavilla, National President of the Federation and Mrs. Margaret Ferri, President of the Cardinal Tomko Chapter; Dear members of the Slovak Catholic Federation, I have accepted your invitation with great joy and I am honored to gather with you, in the presence of the Lord, to preside at the Eucharistic liturgy.

Our liturgical readings of the day invited us **to strengthen our faith our hope**. To strengthen our faith that our Lord Jesus Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. He, the Risen Lord, accompanies us every day on our journey of life, even though we do not often recognize him. He walks with us the very same way as he accompanied the two saddened disciples on their journey to Emmaus, as Saint Luke recorded in his Gospel. He remains with us even when the skies of our own lives become dark and when our own human existence becomes burdened by trials and difficulties. Just as did those two disciples, we recognize him in “the breaking of the bread.” Saint Paul, to whom this year is dedicated, reminds us of this great hope in which we live and await: “For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection...If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him” (Romans 6: 5,8).

The Risen Christ invited the apostles to become the witnesses of his resurrection. He also invites us to become his witnesses through our lives; and “always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope,” as Saint Peter encourages us to do (1 Peter 3:15). The second reading even shows us how we should live and proclaim our faith: “The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments...Whoever keeps his word, the love of God is truly perfected in him”

(1 John 2: 3,5). Therefore, faith which is genuine and effective, the life-giving fellowship with the Lord, **is expressed in the perfect love of one's neighbor, in solidarity.**

We are born for the eternal life on Golgotha, on that place of redemption, where Christ died and rose from a dark tomb for our salvation. From there, the faith in Our Savior was first carried to the surrounding regions by the very first witnesses of his resurrection – the Apostles. Peter and Paul brought it to the countries around the Mediterranean Sea and to Rome; others, to those on the way to India and Africa. Their example was followed by countless missionaries, who throughout the centuries spread the name of Christ: Saint Augustine to Gaul and England; Saint Patrick to Ireland; Saint Boniface to the German tribes; in the ninth century Saints Cyril and Methodius to the Slavs and particularly to our forefathers. Since the sixteenth century, after the discovery of the “New World” – America, this faith in the Risen Lord has been brought by waves of immigrants to all corners of this continent. Also from Slovakia your ancestors began to arrive, mainly in search of a dignified and prosperous life. With them wise bishops sent priests, so in the “New World” they could protect them and assist them in safeguarding their faith.

“**God of our Fathers,**” as the Acts of the Apostles call him in the first reading (Acts 3:13), has given us Easter faith and hope, which was then brought to our ancestors from Greece by **Saints Cyril and Methodius**. Many of us had received this faith through our mothers; it was given to us from the first moments of their loving motherly embrace. We have lived this “faith of our fathers” in our families; we have nurtured it in our churches; we have preserved it in our national associations in Slovakia, as well as in America. We thankfully celebrate that the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II declared the Apostles of the Slavs co-patrons of Europe and bound them to the chain of “the great heralds of the Gospel,” (*cf.* John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Slavorum Apostoli*, nn. 8-16), while other Popes praised their mission and example through eloquent and memorable documents.

They are, therefore, our “**fathers in faith**” and our entire “**heritage of faith**” is connected to them. They taught us how to be faithful to the Risen Lord and his Mother, Our Lady of Sorrows, the Patronness of Slovakia; they taught us how to be faithful to his Church and to the Successors of Saint Peter and of the Apostles. The priests who came with your fathers to the “New World” helped you to cherish that deep and steadfast faith deposited in a servant’s heart; hence, they gave you a true inheritance and a genuine treasure.

This “faith of our fathers” must be your authentic contribution to the life of the entire Catholic Church in the United States to which you belong, and to which you are grafted as branches onto a tree. **Never forget your authentic roots**, the roots from which you have grown. Always appreciate and cherish your faith, the most precious inheritance of your ancestors.

When in the middle of the last century harsh and ruthless religious persecution began to suffocate the religious life of our motherland, in the evil expectation that its sons and daughters would repudiate their attachment to the Catholic Church and to the Pope, you, living in the land of freedom, already had a flourishing heritage built by previous generations of priests. This heritage was later rejuvenated through a new generation of your newborn sons and daughters. Outside of the life of faith in your parishes and towns, Slovaks in the United States also established national fraternal societies and organizations. The Religious Congregation of the Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius and the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Andrew Svorad in Cleveland were founded to assist in this growth. Among so many other valuable associations that were born in order to augment this heritage, you constituted “**Združenie slovenských katolíkov**,” which will soon celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. My entire priestly service has been closely linked with the mission of the **Slovak Catholic Federation**.

I want to restate today, with deep conviction, that your Federation does have an extraordinary history of contribution to the spiritual and cultural inheritance of Saints Cyril and Methodius and of promoting its awareness among Catholics of Slovak heritage in the United States; in establishing the bonds of fraternal cooperation among Slovak Catholic societies; in assisting the Church in Slovakia, primarily by supporting the education of priests first in the Pontifical College of Saint John Nepomucene and later in the Pontifical College of Saints Cyril and Methodius in the Eternal City of Rome. After my priestly ordination in 1949 the Holy See appointed me as the Vice-Rector of the Pontifical College of Saint John Nepomucene, established for seminarians from the former Czecho-Slovakia. Among them were a great number of Slovak seminarians who suddenly became, sad to say, “cut off” and disconnected from their persecuted Bishops; and left totally without any assistance. During the Jubilee Year 1950, the Federation organized a great pilgrimage of American Slovaks to Rome, led by Monsignors Kušnier and Bíroš. The Federation supported the building of a memorial altar at the place of the first tomb of Saint Cyril in the Basilica of Saint Clement in Rome. From 1960 the Federation under the leadership of His Excellency, Andrew G. Grutka, Bishop of Gary, Indiana, most generously supported the construction of the new institute of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Rome, which was established in order to become a house of priestly formation and a publishing house for the religious literature in the Slovak language which was then outlawed in Slovakia. I remember how Bishop Grutka challenged you “to repay in kindness the gift of faith received from Slovakia.” The establishment of the Slovak Institute of Saints Cyril and Methodius was generously supported by the Slovak Benedictine Abbey in Cleveland; the two Slovak “Jednotas” – the First Catholic Slovak Union and the First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association; the Ladies Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union and the Slovak Catholic Sokol.

After the liberation of 1989, your Federation still continues to support the “Ústav” in Rome – now elevated to the status of the Pontifical College and Pontifical Institute – and other activities of the Church in Slovakia. New initiatives have been born also in your homeland. After my appointment as Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, your Federation established a local Chapter of Cardinal Tomko, which enthusiastically supported global missions of the Church. Today it is

guided by Mrs. Margaret Ferri and is hosting this Convention. In the future, it is possible that new local chapters will be established in order to carry out the purposes of the Slovak Catholic Federation.

The goals and principles of your Federation are well known. You will reiterate them during the Convention. Because of shortness of time, I have summarized them in the context of today's Liturgy; as they are very much in line with our Easter faith, hope and brotherly solidarity. During the present day economic crisis, your faithful promotion of these life-giving principles is even more imperative.

As we look back at the rich harvest of the last hundred years, and on the many blessings that have been bestowed on your Federation, and on so much good done in recent years under the leadership of your Episcopal Moderator, His Excellency, Bishop Joseph Adamec, we give thanks and praise to Almighty God who is the source of all that is good. As we celebrate this Eucharist, I see in front of my eyes countless dedicated priests, religious and lay men and women of unrelenting enthusiasm, trust in and love of the Lord whom I have met during those sixty years and whose names are written in the book of life. From Rome I bring you the Apostolic Blessing of our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI and I daily pray, with you and for you: May the Lord abide with you forever! May you safeguard the faith of our forefathers! Dedičstvo otcov zachovaj nám Pane! May our Almighty and Loving God bless you all!

Amen.

Jozef Cardinal Tomko